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SUBJECT: (C) PAKISTAN: ARD CHAIRMAN IN LONDON

Classified By: PolMinCouns Maura Connelly; reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) The Chairman of Pakistan's Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD), Makhdum Amin Fahim, is visiting London and met with Poloff October 13. He said former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif (whose parties, PPP and ML/N respectively, are the main components of ARD) will meet in London October 19. Fahim said the Musharraf regime is trying hard to split ARD, including by offering him money (Fahim is the President of Bhutto's PPP). He said rumors abound that either PPP or ML/N will cut a deal with Musharraf, but he and Sharif met and then held a joint press conference reaffirming the alliance.

¶2. (C) Fahim told Poloff "we need to reconcile the military with the political parties," by finding an honorable way for the military to give up governing. He said ARD has presented two main demands to the regime; both are steps to ensure "reasonably" fair elections, as it would be unrealistic to expect fully fair elections:

- appoint a competent and independent chief electoral commissioner and electoral commissioner;

- form a government of national consensus to prepare for and manage the 2007 elections. He said the Bangladesh model, relying on the judiciary, would not be appropriate because the Pakistani judiciary "is not independent."

¶3. (C) Fahim acknowledged that the USG has been pressing for free and fair elections. He asked what the USG's attitude would be if Islamists won fair and square. Poloff replied in general terms - making clear this was not specifically about Pakistan or even the Muslim world: Americans' commitment to democracy is genuine and deep; the key challenge for any religious party is to reassure others that it would abide by the constitution if elected, and not disregard it in favor of a "higher" (religious) law.

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